

KANGAROO GROUND

CHRONICLE

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NEWSLETTER OF THE

ANDREW ROSS MUSEUM INC

School House, Kangaroo Ground 3097

Volume 5 No 2



Winter 1999

MEMBERSHIP FORM

THE ANDREW ROSS MUSEUM, KANGAROO GROUND
IS A VICTORIAN AND LOCAL TREASURE

We need a lot more community help and involvement to
keep going and present the Museum proudly to our many
visitors.

Become a MEMBER for just \$10 per year, a LIFE
MEMBER for \$100, or a DONOR - to keep us in
shape.

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Diana Bassett-Smith
Secretary, The Andrew Ross Museum
School House
Kangaroo Ground 3097

Please enrol me/us in membership of the Andrew Ross Museum Inc.

- Member (\$10 per year)
 Life Member (\$100)

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CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

Sometimes I've believed as many as six impossible things
before breakfast!

- Lewis Carroll's 'Queen'

To choose a special day to launch two minor books about Kangaroo Ground was out of the question for our Andrew Ross Museum Committee. To choose another day just to remember the K G General Store burning down 100 years ago in 1899 was simply not on. And, to choose a third separate day for an evening Cemetery Tour was clearly over the top altogether. So, we joined these three impossibles together in one event and wonderfully celebrated THE LOT on Sunday, May 2nd - all before dinner!

KANGAROO GROUND CELEBRATES 1999 was a God-sent day - autumn at its best. Many arrived at the School-ground early and six shuttle-bus tours of KG's treasures were completed before the Mayor of Nillumbik (Bill Penrose) officially opened the Book-launch, Store-burning, Cemetery-walk at 5pm. Prior to the launch we received from Harry Gilham (President of the Eltham Historic Society) two precious gifts for our Museum. The first was a *1922 Minute Book* recording the ladies' work to help finance the KG Tower. The second was a new publication, *A Chronology of Known Local Events 1838-1998*, which resources and records 150 years of important events and people in the Shire of Nillumbik and the former Shires of Eltham and the former Shires of Eltham and Diamond Valley.

At 5.30 George Donaldson from Opotiki, New Zealand, a great-grandson of KG pioneers James Bruce and Isabella Donaldson, launched a book containing his great-uncle James

Thomas Donaldson's Diary of 1889 Diary of 1889 and some family letters from the mid-1850s. Following this, Peter Oyston, from the UK and KG, launched a *Furphy Poetry Anthology* - the result of a competition widely supported by over 100 poets' contributions at our FURPHY FEST IN 1996.

Immediately following this celebration nearly 150 people crossed the Main Road to the General Store where Diana Bassett-Smith ably read the 1899 *Evelyn Observer's* article reporting the total destruction of the Store by fire at 3am New Year's Eve day, 31st December 1899. A huge bonfire burned near the store as the KG Fire Brigade truck hurried to extinguish it - siren blaring - with eight 'Burns children' emerging hurriedly from the store; a lone Scottish piper lamenting this very warm occasion!

At 6.15 we headed for the Kangaroo Ground Cemetery - a crisp night under a full moon - to find nearly 200 people assembled for Mick Woiwod's outstanding Cemetery Tour commentary and the moving readings of a handful of Furphy poems. The Cemetery looked a picture with its hundred burning candles, and we concluded with tasty refreshments after a fulfilling tour.

Numerous KG books were sold and new members enrolled. Our thanks are due to many: the KG School, the Fire Brigade, Cemetery Management Committee, Local Police, Rob and Ann (in period costume) of KG General Store, the many who assisted with books, food and museum, the pipers and musical group from Eltham College, poetry readers and launchers. Particularly, thanks are due to Mick Woiwod for his Bus and Cemetery commentaries, and to the Andrew Ross Museum Committee who made these singularly impossible events come together at our May 2nd KANGAROO GROUND CELEBRATES DAY 1999. Come and join us!

- Bruce Nixon, Chairman

DISASTROUS FIRE AT KANGAROO GROUND

Diana Bassett-Smith, our Secretary, supported by “a cast of thousands” and amazing special effects, recently provided an account of the night one hundred years ago when the Kangaroo Ground Store burnt down. Here is the original report which was printed in the *Evelyn Observer* : -

TOTAL DESTRUCTION OF THE KANGAROO GROUND GENERAL STORE AND POST OFFICE.

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The most disastrous fire that has ever occurred in this district took place at about 3 O'clock last Saturday morning, when Mr J A Burns' block of buildings - comprising private dwelling, general store, post-office, and detached store-room - with all contents, were completely destroyed by fire, the inmates - Mrs Burns and family - narrowly escaping with their lives. Mr Burns was away at the time in town on his usual weekly trip for stores.

Neighbours were quickly on the spot after the fire broke out, but absolutely nothing could possibly be done to in any way stop the conflagration as it burnt so quickly and fiercely. How the fire originated is not known, but Mrs Burns informs us that at the hour named hearing a peculiar noise, which she at first took to be the rattle of a passing conveyance, but the noise continuing and continuing and increasing in sound she

got out of bed to ascertain the cause, and on entering the dining-room discovered the wall behind the piano in flames; getting a bucket of water she threw it on the burning wall, but the fire had too great a hold and the water had no effect. Mrs Burns then turned her attention to the safety of the children - some eight in number - who were sleeping in separate rooms, and so quickly and fiercely did the fire burn - the building being of wood - that she had only time to rouse them from sleep when the whole of the dwelling part of the building was in flames and Mrs Burns and her children had barely time to escape in their nightdresses; indeed, Miss Jessie Burns' hair was singed in rescuing one of her little brothers. The children ran quickly to surrounding neighbours for assistance. As it happened, people were up and about, although so early in the morning. On Mr Cameron's farm a number of men were busily carting in hay and stacking - it being bright moonlight - with the object of getting finished before the heat of the day. The fire was noticed when it first broke through the roof, and, of course, a rush was made to the place, but nothing could be done to save anything. Messrs T Boardman and G Smith burst open the shop door with the object of saving the books, but the attempt was futile, as the place was a regular furnace. So fierce were the flames that water had to be thrown on the front of the school-house across the road to prevent it catching fire, and had it not been that a heavy dew was lying on the ground at the time it would be hard to say where the fire would have ended.

Absolutely nothing was saved from either the dwelling-house, store, or post-office. In the post-office, besides the letters and the papers destroyed were some

£40 worth of stamps and postal notes burnt. These were in a so-called fire-proof safe supplied by the General Post-Office, but for all the good it was it might just as well have been made of tin.

The loss is a severe one to Mr Burns, for although the buildings were insured for £450, the stock was uninsured, and the damage done by the fire is between £900 and £1000.

Last Saturday and Monday the State School was used temporarily for a post-office. On Monday a workman from the General Post Office brought up a telephone instrument and adjusted the wire to a small building at the back of the late post-office, where post and telephone business is now carried on.

We might mention that fortunately we got the bulk of last week's issue away by the 8am and 4pm mails last Friday, but 150 copies posted after that hour were burnt. We printed a fresh lot to replace these, but should any one of our subscribers not have received a paper, by dropping us a line we will be pleased to send them a copy.



GHOST STORIES

Are there any ghosts hereabouts? Have you seen one, or heard any local ghost stories? Please tell us about any local ghosts. Meanwhile, here is an “almost” ghost story.

When I first came to live in Kangaroo Ground, I had neighbours who could still remember the first occupiers of the humble little farm house into which my young wife and I moved. These first occupants had been a bachelor brother and sister. They built the original four roomed, inner part of the house in the early 1900s. A few extensions, verandahs, etc., had been added later.

According to our elderly neighbours, there was a problem when the brother died. Between the time his grave was dug at the Kangaroo Ground Cemetery and the burial ceremony, there was a heavy rain storm. The grave filled with water. The coffin was not so much lowered into the ground as set afloat. Attempts to submerge and sink it with sticks and shovels were unsuccessful. It kept bobbing up to the surface again. Embarrassed mourners had to turn away and return home, leaving the local grave-digger to somehow sink the coffin. History hasn't recorded how the grave-digger solved the problem. Apparently he was successful. I can't recall seeing any water-logged ghost during the time we occupied his house.

THE WAY WE WERE

We continue to publish some of the prize-winning entries in the recent competition. This charming set of recollections was written by long-time Kangaroo Ground resident Joy Ness.

Beautiful Kangaroo Ground, with wonderful hills, valleys and mountains spread all around. I have had the good fortune to live here for 58 years, and have seen little change.

Settled by Scottish families in the 1840s, it was always a farming area. There were not many houses when I first came, in 1940. It was a close knit farming community, everyone knew everyone else. The farms were mostly devoted to dairying. Some crops were grown, especially on what was known as "Garden Hill" - vegetables, maize and oats which did well on the black volcanic soil, and some hay-making.

The roads were gravel. There was no electric power or mains water for many years. We managed with wood fire stoves and open fire places, tank water, kerosene lighting and struggled with inefficient coolgardie safes. In the wash house were wooden troughs and a wood fired copper. Bath water was heated on the kitchen stove in kerosene tins and carried to the bathroom. For ironing flat irons were heated on the stove. Each week I would churn cream from the dairy to make butter.

The little township was our community centre. With the Post Office and store, built in 1899, the Presbyterian Church in 1851, the school in 1878 and the school house the next year. All are still in use, the school house as the Andrew Ross Museum,

named after the first school master. There was also the public hall, centre for all our entertainment. There we used to hold our fetes, dances, balls, flower shows and school breakups. On "Garden Hill" stood the Memorial Tower built in 1926 in memory of servicemen in the first World War and re-dedicated later to those who served in the 2nd World War.

There was no public transport, other than perhaps catching the mail bus to the nearest railway station at Eltham, or getting a lift with the "milky" to Wattle Glen station. Few people had cars or trucks. They perhaps had a horse and jinker, or rode ponies or bikes. Otherwise we walked!

Children walked to school or rode bikes or ponies. The nearest phone was at the store. The nearest doctors were at Eltham or Diamond Creek, the nearest hospital the Bush Nursing one at Eltham. All this was in the 1940s-50s.

There never was much bush in Kangaroo Ground, just an open rolling country. But the bush in spring was a wonderland of delightful wild flowers, and many birds. I have recorded seventy-two species of birds in and around my garden over the years. We have possums, sugar gliders, spiny antelopes, bats, eagles and owls, with wombats in the gully. Of recent years there have been many kangaroos, some of which invade my garden. There were never any kangaroos when I first came here.

Now we are threatened with sub-division but the vineyards are very beautiful and soften the landscape.

And we still have the hawthorn hedges planted last century.

- Joy Ness
"View Hill"
Kangaroo Ground

KANGAROO GROUND SPORTS

One hundred years ago, the Kangaroo Ground Athletic Club held its annual sports. The following is an abridged report on the proceedings, published in the *Evelyn Observer*, 7th April 1899: -

Committee

Messrs. J. A. Burns (Treasurer), G. Smith, J. Ainley, J. Johnston, A. White sen., W. Nicholas, E. Weller, W. Everitt, C. Jones, J. Mess, B. Johnston.

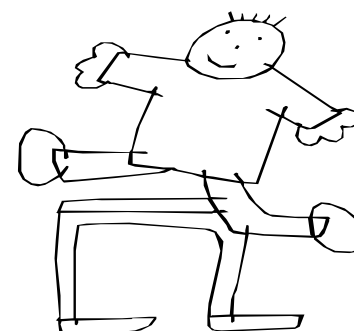
Anything but propitious weather favored these sports on Friday last, nevertheless the attendance, under the circumstances, was fairly large, and the sports passed off very pleasantly. Had it been fine no doubt the entries would have been more numerous and the attendance considerably larger. Mr. W. Everitt was very successful as starter, and Messrs. J. Bell and Robt. Stevenson acted efficiently as judges. A word of praise is due to the Committee for the excellent manner in which the sports were carried out, and especially to the genial Secretary (Mr. Thomas Cameron) for his labors. Below we give the list of winners.

The Committee desire us to convey their thanks to Messrs. Maher and W. Amstron for their services as handicappers, and to Mr. George Smith for the use of his paddock for the sports.

In the evening a ball was held in the local hall, which was largely attended and thoroughly enjoyed. The refreshments were supplied by Mrs J. A. Burns, and as usual were good.

Items on the sporting program, and winners, were :-

- District Maiden Plate - *E. Pepper*
- Boys' Race (under fourteen years) - *T. Renehan*
- Open Hurdle Race - *T. J. Logan*
- Pony High Jump - *J. Johnston's "Young Alladin"*
- Horse High Jump - *J. Johnston's "Myrtle"*
- Girls' Race (under fifteen years) - *Fanny Norman*
- Open Handicap - *W. Russell*
- Shooting Match at Target - *T. Maher*
- Sack Race - *A. Mess*
- Tilting the Ring at a Gallop - *A. Mess*
- District Handicap - *R. West*
- Egg and Spoon Race - *A. Mess*



GEORGE TAYLOR'S RECOLLECTIONS

“I was born in 1911.”

Seated with George in the sunny front room of his house in Kangaroo Ground, I consider how many other residents hereabouts could recall events from so long ago. Spread out on the table are mementos of his ancestors. George speaks of them. He speaks also of his own long life, telling the story of a hard-working Australian who has seen most of the twentieth century.

George is a grandson of Robert Charles Harris. Readers of this chronicle will know that Robert Charles Harris was the proprietor and editor of the *Evelyn Observer*, the local newspaper published in Kangaroo Ground from 1873 to 1917. Surviving copies provide the largest source of Kangaroo Ground's early history, including the series of reminiscences of Andrew Ross.

I ask George if he has any memories of this grandfather who died in 1921 when George was a young school boy.

“The Harrises were never people who kept many stock. My grandfather, however, had his own horse. He was the only one who could catch it and saddle it to his buggy. My grandmother was always very warm, welcoming, and loving. To a young boy, my grandfather seemed rather austere by comparison. At Sunday lunch he would leave the table, take up a large carving knife from the kitchen and take it to a grindstone in the garden where he could sharpen it. Returning, he would carve the roast.

“Besides his work with the newspaper, he was involved with the churches at Kangaroo Ground and Panton Hill, and he was also a justice of the peace. He purchased several properties on this side of Kangaroo Ground, including a heavily-timbered block of sixty

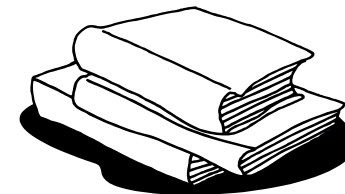
acres in Alma Road.

“A generous man who tended to give away all that he had, his estate at the time of his death was very meagre indeed. He is buried at the St Andrews Cemetery, but the exact site is unmarked and unknown.”

Of other times and people in Kangaroo Ground, George has some amusing and unpublishable recollections. There was the member of one of Kangaroo Ground's pioneering families who used to walk behind his horse and plough all day long swearing like a trooper. “If you had a horse and a scoop in those days, you would have a go at making a dam. Of course, some were only pot holes, but others were quite substantial. Round and round would go the horse. A load of earth, stone and clay would accumulate in the scoop and be dumped at one end to make a wall. In time the horse would consolidate and strengthen the wall as it walked along it. With the first heavy rains, however, would come a rush of water. In those days the open country did not take up the rainfall as does today's pasture. Down would come a rush of water and away would go most of the dam walls. Only with the advent of bulldozers and the work done by people like the Ness Brothers were local dams made durable.”

George and his wife Daisy live at No 235 on the Kangaroo Ground - Panton Hill road.

- John Austin



1999 WINTER CHATTERBOX

THE CHRONICLE We live in a changing world. The autumn edition was with our new editor. John, thank you for such a good effort. And now we have a new publisher. Thank you and welcome Eugénie. John's daughter. There is no doubt about it, Kangaroo Ground thrives on family input.

MAY GREAT EVENT It really was a splendid book launch, feiry fun at the Store, and a memorable descriptive walk at the Cemetery. To everyone who so ably assisted in making the day a success, thank you. And weren't the pipers great! Peter from Scotch College and Robert from the Police Pipe Band .

HISTORIC MEMORABILIA Remember our slogan "Don't bin it, museum it". Nunawading Historical Society have some more implements which they have saved from our district. These will be added to our display in due time.

VOLUNTEERS Thank you to new members Mardi and Noel who helped on May 2nd.

MEMBERSHIP is growing slowly and we want and need your support. Constructive ideas about displays and help to put on further displays is especially needed. Are there any members who could help man the Museum for two hours on a Sunday afternoon two or three times a year? My phone number is 9712 0668.

PUBLICATIONS The Donaldson diary is sold out. There are still copies available of the collected Furphy poetry competition entries. Who has read *The Boy Of The Old Brigade*? Visit the Museum and find out why it was published. The Eltham Historical Society has published a chronology. Come and visit the Museum and browse through the list of happenings for five minutes as you may be able to add your knowledge of some special event that occurred in the district's past. When were the local vineyards planted? We would like to know? When did Bill Banks take champion fleece at Whittlesea Show and go on to win at the Royal Show? We don't see many sheep in Kangaroo Ground now. Senator Guthrie or Corriedale fame was linked to Kangaroo Ground. More in a future edition. When were the local vineyards planted? We would like to know? When did Bill Banks take champion fleece at Whittlesea Show and go on to win at the Royal Show? We don't see many sheep in Kangaroo Ground now. Senator Guthrie or Corriedale fame was linked to Kangaroo Ground. More in a future edition.

INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY John Austin has extracted the indexes of the births, deaths and marriages which were registered at Kangaroo Ground up until 1920. Yes, you can apply for this information at the Museum as the computer is now installed. A printer is on our future shopping list.

TAXATION With guidance and help from the Taxation Department I have managed to wade through the paper work so ... good news Gifts of \$2 and over to the Museum are now tax deductible.

GARDEN Libby and Allan Williams continue to support us. Thank you. The vine is due to be pruned. I understand Robyn Male will be up with her secateurs soon.

DONATIONS Thanks to Peter Bassett-Smith for photos to add to our collection. Also to Bob and Anne Moloney for photos, and to Mr and Mrs Muir for a Wippell family old nightshirt.

CATALOGUING Margaret and Mick Woiwod continue to be busy with this task.

ACCREDITATION REGISTRATION runs out in July. The Museums Of Australia Accreditation Plan reviewers will again be assessing us before long. This involves scrutiny of such activities as our documentation, cataloguing, displays, events, publications, accounts, forward planning, marketing, etc.

FUTURE FUNCTIONS We would like input from our members as to what you would like as a major or minor function. Please let us know.

OUR CHANGING COUNTRYSIDE In your driving, walking, or riding in Kangaroo Ground in 1999, have you noticed more housing, the increasing area under vines, new olive groves, roadside and Watson's Creek area revegetation, and the rapidly expanding mobs of kangaroos? But no onion patches.

HERITAGE SITES If you believe there is a tree, view, building, or site that should be on our heritage list, please let us know.

- Diana Bassett-Smith, Hon. Sec.